What is claimed:

1.   A method of handling time-sensitive messages, comprising steps of:

      marking a message as time-sensitive;

      sending the marked message to a recipient; and

      automatically receiving a reply from the recipient regarding the marked message within a

time period of the time-sensitivity of the marked message.

2.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the marking step further comprises indicating

whether snoozing is allowed by the recipient for this message.

3.   The method according to Claim 1, wherein the marking step further comprises indicating

an ending time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.

4.   The method according to Claim 3, wherein the marking step further comprises indicating a

starting time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.

5.   The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

      receiving the marked message at a computing device of the recipient;

      determining whether the time period of the time-sensitivity of the received message has

been reached; and

      requiring the received message to be rendered to the recipient if so.

1   6.   The method according to Claim 5, further comprising the step of requiring the recipient to

2   respond to the rendered message.

1   7.   A method of improving electronic communications, comprising steps of:

2   receiving a plurality of electronic messages by a recipient to whom the electronic messages

3   are addressed; and

4   evaluating the received electronic messages for processing, further comprising steps of:

5   determining whether a selected one of the received electronic messages is time-

6   sensitive; and

7   requiring the selected one to be rendered to the recipient if so.

1   8.   The method according to Claim 7, wherein the evaluating step further comprises the step

2   of:

3   suppressing the requiring step unless a time period of the time-sensitivity has been

4   reached.

1   9.   The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the steps of:

2   determining, when the selected one is time-sensitive and a time period of the time-

3   sensitivity has been reached, whether snoozing is allowed for the selected one; and

4   if so, delaying the requiring step until a later time, wherein the later time is within the time

5   period of the time-sensitivity.

1   10.   The method according to Claim 7, wherein the evaluating step further comprises the step

2   of:

3   determining, when the selected one is time-sensitive and the time period of the time-

4   sensitivity has been reached, whether snoozing is allowed for the selected one; and

5   if so, allowing the recipient to suppress the requiring step only while (1) a starting time of

6   the time period has been reached but (2) an ending time of the time period has not been reached.

1   11.   The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the steps of:

2   requiring the recipient to create a response to the rendered selected one; and

3   sending the response to a sender of the rendered selected one.

1   12.   The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the step of determining whether

2   processing of the rendered selected one is complete, and if not, remembering the rendered

3   selected one for subsequent evaluation at a later time, wherein the later time is within the time

4   period of the time-sensitivity.

1   13.   The method according to Claim 7, wherein the requiring step is suppressed unless (1) a

2   starting time of a time period of the time-sensitivity has been reached and (2) an ending time of

3   the time period of the time-sensitivity has not been reached.

1   14.   The method according to Claim 7, wherein the electronic messages are e-mail messages.

1   15.   The method according to Claim 7, wherein the electronic messages are electronic

2   calendar events.

1   16.   The method according to Claim 7, wherein the electronic messages are to-do items.

1   17.   The method according to Claim 7, further comprising the steps of:

2   determining, when the selected one is time-sensitive and a time period of the time-

3   sensitivity is approaching or has been reached, whether a hierarchy of event notification

4   techniques has been defined for various intervals of time-sensitivity, and if so, selecting a

5   notification technique which corresponds to an amount of time in the time period in addition to or

6   instead of the step of requiring the selected one to be rendered to the recipient.

1   18.   A system for handling time-sensitive messages, comprising:

2   means for marking a message as time-sensitive;

3   means for sending the marked message to a recipient; and

4   means for automatically receiving a reply from the recipient regarding the marked message

5   within a time period of the time-sensitivity of the marked message.

1   19.   The system according to Claim 18, wherein the marking means further comprises means

2   for indicating an ending time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.

1   20.   A system for improving electronic communications, comprising:

2   means for receiving a plurality of electronic messages by a recipient to whom the

3   electronic messages are addressed;

4   means for determining whether a selected one of the received electronic messages is time-

5   sensitive, and if so, whether a time period of the time-sensitivity has been reached; and

6   means for requiring the selected one to be rendered to the recipient if so.

1   21.   The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining further comprises

2   means for determining whether the time period of the time-sensitivity has been exceeded; and

3   wherein the means for requiring is suppressed if the time period of the time-sensitivity has been

4   exceeded.

1   22.   A computer program product for handling time-sensitive messages, the computer program

2   product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

3   computer-readable program code means for marking a message as time-sensitive;

4   computer-readable program code means for sending the marked message to a recipient;

5   and

6   computer-readable program code means for automatically receiving a reply from the

7   recipient regarding the marked message within a time period of the time-sensitivity of the marked

8   message.

1   23.   The computer program product according to Claim 22, wherein the computer-readable

2   program code means for marking further comprises computer-readable program code means for

3   indicating an ending time for the time period of the time-sensitivity of the message.

1   24.   A computer program product for improving electronic communications, the computer

2   program product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

3   computer-readable program code means for receiving a plurality of electronic messages by

4   a recipient to whom the electronic messages are addressed;

5   computer-readable program code means for determining whether a selected one of the

6   received electronic messages is time-sensitive, and if so, whether a time period of the time-

7   sensitivity has been reached; and

8   computer-readable program code means for requiring the selected one to be rendered to

9   the recipient if so.

1   25.   The computer program product according to Claim 24, wherein the computer-readable

2   program code means for determining further comprises computer-readable program code means

3   for determining whether the time period of the time-sensitivity has been exceeded; and wherein

4   the computer-readable program code means for requiring is suppressed if the time period of the

5   time-sensitivity has been exceeded.